

Famous Star Sniffed at Contact
With Young Utility Actor, Then
The Film Cutter's Turn Came

IT'S ALL IN THE CUTTING

BY
WILBUR HALL.

ROD McQUEEN, utility actor for the Quadrangle Motion Picture Company, was low in his mind.

The immediate reason for his depression was (or were) his pants. They were made of some sort of flimsy cotton cloth, they were a flaming red, they sagged down, and he was caught there with bands, one of which was elastic, and the other which was secured by a safety pin that, in moments of stress, had a trick of opening and burying itself in the McQueen calf. Even as the pants of an Algerian soldier, waiting to be attacked in an English consulate made of pasteboard and scantling, which stood a few rods away, they were discredit-able.

Rod was a new man on the Quad lot. He had to admit that the life of a motion picture actor had certain points over existence as a mule skinner for a desert borax company but none of them would have been strong enough to lure him into those red pants had it not been for the fact of Ann Lusk.

Any hero in a costume a good deal like Rod's own, was selling cigarettes in a kidded Algerian cafe on Stage Three at the moment, and submitting himself to gross insults from a group of tourists. The idea was to establish in the picture the character of the tourists, and being small, timid and gently reared, could never quite get thoroughly into her head the fact that such affronts were all part of the day's work as a minor player in a Quad company, and she flamed and cringed at every thrust. This, of course, was exactly what Duke Bassett, the director, wanted her to do; her perfect unsophistication was her distinguishing charm and Bassett knew that, given time, he could make a star of her and catch for himself, quite properly, some of the glory.

When the men taunted her she cringed, and when she cringed Rod McQueen's fists knotted and his muscles tensed and he had to stop himself to keep from going to hit and knocking somebody for a three-bagger. This enforced self-control, coupled with the thought of his pants, finally compelled him to withdraw from the immediate vicinity of the action and to seat himself in a quiet place on the lot, where he could avoid witnessing Ann's humiliations and at the same time re-fasten that safety pin.

"It's a long road that has no speed cop," he murmured, half aloud, as much better than that of the thousand faces of Von Markel's last encyclopedia with you sitting under my window shooting the scenery full of half-baked ideas. Did somebody give you a permit to sit there or something?"

Rod looked up into the pleasantest and most cheerful face imaginable. "When you talk like that, man," Rod observed, evenly, "you'd ought to do it with your mouth twisted to one side. Do you expect me to believe what you say or what you smile?"

"Come in, then. I'll see if I can find a quart cup. I never like to drink alone."

"I believe I'm Pistachio Bologna, just now. In my right clothes I'm Rod McQueen."

"McQueen? No, there's some mistake I guess. With a name like that you couldn't be any chance be the sort of person who'd crave a small portion of intoxicating liquor, of course?"

"No," Rod replied, solemnly. "Not a small portion. Less than a full-sized drink only gives me lock-jaw."

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"You being?"

"Me being the cutter."

"That leaves me about thirty miles from a water hole. What do you cut—salaries?"

"I cut film. Directors and designers and editors and general managers come and go, but I go on forever. The author thinks he writes the story. He's mistaken. The continuity hound thinks he translates it; the director thinks he produces it; the stars think they act it; the old man thinks he sells it to the public and makes 'em like it. Well, they're all wrong. Around a studio, my son, the cutter is the noblest work of creation."

"That's the host crossed to a table on which were several dozen large tin spoons with narrow ribbons of film. One of these was suspended on a shaft fixed on the bench; Burke seized a loose end of film, unwound a few feet, and held it to the light."

"That's the first part of scene ninety-eight in Von Markel's story 'The Widow of Pook,' he said. 'Von's idea of himself is that raw stock—film that hasn't been shot—is bought by the old man for him to put lots of little pictures on, and so he goes and does what he thinks he is supposed to do. This story of his is supposed to be a six-reel, 4,000 feet, counting subtitles and introductions and everything. He made 82,000 feet.'"

"I begin to see," Rod said. "You're the bird that makes 6,000 feet grow where only eighty or ninety thousand grew before?"

"That's part of it. When the film comes to me it's a drunkard's dream of scenes, sets, cast, story, director's ideas, bunk, waste, and dead loss. I have to start in at first with the script in one hand and a pair of shears in the other, and find out what it's all about. After I've trimmed it to the bone I have to make a story of it. Once in a while part of the idea the author put in in the first place slips by me and creeps into the picture, but I try to see that doesn't happen too often. I write the story in film."

"That's clear as dirt on a white shirt," McQueen said. "But I was asking about stars."

"If you'll stand hitched a minute I'll get to the stars," Jerry Burke said, sourly. "There isn't a star on earth that can act as well as a nice, bright, sharp pair of scissors. The cameraman can make a star look foolish without anybody knowing how it's done. An electrician can move his spotlight a tenth of an inch and give a leading lady a face like an old maid aunt. But when it comes to making a star look like a star, that's where I come in. I'll put my shears and glue-pot against any combination in pictures and give it a flying start. When you hear the favorite question of today in America discussed now you'll know the answer. What's wrong with the movies?"

Rod McQueen adjusted his red trousers with a grunt and a grin. He crossed to the door and looked out. He lowered the window shade a fraction of an inch. He stepped softly back and addressed himself to the cutter's right ear.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a ham-knuckle," he said. "But if you will take a few minutes off and size up the little lady I was orating about—"

"Don't say too much," Jerry Burke advised him harshly, but with his pleasant smile. "Take a dislike to you that makes me want to do something for you. What's this rising star's name?"

Rod colored again. "Ann Lusk."

"I've got you. In Duke Bassett's company, eh? All right. It's a joke with me. Nora Norris, who's playing his lead now, tried to get the cat tied to me a while back for cutting out

her best pajama scene in 'Nobody's Husband' and I wouldn't do her a wrong for worlds. Not for worlds! Let's go over to the stage and pipe this pippin of yours."

JULIUS David, owner, dictator and supreme authority of the Quadrangle Motion Picture Corporation, knew his public.

"When I got to make pictures for the sake of art, understand," he would say, "it's time I should go back making films. The people that buy tickets like my pictures, and you could let the rest of them talk till they get blue in the face. If I want to know whether a picture is good, I look in the balance sheet and not in the newspapers!"

Mr. David proved his contentions, too. He undertook to lay out broad general policies for his production manager, and the latter undertook to deliver sure-fire releases. About half the time he missed, but then he could always blame the author, the director, the star, the case, the cutter or the decadent public taste. The other half of the time his results hit the bulls-eye. And when a motion picture hits the bulls-eye it is not a bell that rings, but large, solid, beautiful gold coins—by the basketful.

Pursuant to the policy of pleasing the people, Mr. David ran a motion-picture factory. His raw materials were of an infinite variety, and of those raw materials perhaps not the least was Gerald Sisson, playing Handsome Harry leads.

Gerald thought well of himself, which gave him one vote. Apparently millions of sweet young things in orchestra chairs and loge seats agreed with him, but after that the returns were all in. As far as the Hollywood studios were concerned, he was an egg.

Gerald was, to begin with, far, far too pretty. He had the complexion of a schoolgirl, the manners of a continental dandy, the bearing of a road-show Hamlet and the brains of a gnat. There were those who went so far as to say that this comparison was unfair to the gnat.

But, true to his instincts Julius kept Gerald Sisson on the payroll, and up near the top, too. Because he certainly was a money getter in the small towns. Gerald was big, handsome, impressive, and the susceptible female fans adored him. He possessed amazingly well and he certainly could wear clothes, whether they were the black-and-white of his \$500 London-made evening dress or the corduroys and flannels of an engineer in "The Bridge Builder."

Any way you took him, Gerald was a valuable member of the Quad family—except humanly.

DUKE Bassett, assigned to the direction of "The Pool of Tears," swore in four languages and Volapuk when he was informed Gerald was to play the man lead in the piece opposite Nora Norris. The Norris had no particular form of intelligence that anyone had ever been able to classify or put a name to, but she was handsome and looked well in water-soaked clothing or when she was being carried down a ladder in a fire-rescue scene. Bassett had no great love for her, but he could make her act. Gerald was different. Gerald was, for Bassett, impossible. Principally because, when there was any hardship or peril to be undergone by the hero in the making of a story, Gerald had to be doubled. And doubling a hero is not, in any sense, an easy or pleasant job for the director.

"The Pool of Tears" was a hair-raiser. Its great climax was the bursting of a dam, through which the hero and heroine were swept in a bore of rushing water, logs, floats, debris and dead cattle. One look at that scene had told Duke Bassett that he would have to play it with a dou-



CHILDRESS SENT ROD TOTTERING OVER THE BANK INTO DEEP WATER.

putting up an arm to guard his face. "What have I done to you?"

"You've saved me from a ticklish situation."

"By looking enough like Gerald Sisson?"

"Then kick me in the face!" Rod McQueen exclaimed, lowering his head. "Are you kidding me, or are you tired of having me around?"

The director laughed. "I should have explained first and insulted you afterwards, McQueen," he said. "You don't look enough like Gerald Sisson to hurt your reputation, but you're built like him and about his height, and dark, and I feel it in my bones that you are going to double for him in the big scenes in this 'Pool of Tears' thing we are going to begin to shoot today."

"Go back to the barrier and start even," Rod suggested. "I wasn't here when they rang the bell."

"Gerald plays the lead in the story. But he doesn't like to muss his good clothes, so we put someone else in to take his place in the scenes of blood and violence. What I want you to do is to wade out into twelve feet of water, grab Nora Norris in your arms, and go over a low dam with her. After that you can drag her to the bank, where Gerald will be waiting to come in for a close-up."

"I begin to see light. Then all the kissing has to be done by Gerald?"

"Oh, I'll let you kiss her once. It might not be a bad idea."

"Wait a minute, comrade! I'll wade around in the water for Gerald, but you can let him do his own love-making. Why do we go?"

"If I were a French general I would kiss you on both cheeks, McQueen!" he cried, delightedly.

"Say it with flowers!" Rod retorted.

IN the high mountains above San Bernardino the "Pool of Tears" Company stood on a point of rocks at the edge of a small reservoir and listened languidly while Duke Bassett explained the story of the climactic scene in the big fifth reel.

"If you love your art, folks," he cried, "put some life into this thing, now! Gerald, the hero, has just come up from his sawmill in the village below to find Childress and his gang monkeying with his dam. That's what we were shooting yesterday. Nora and her crippled mother are in the village. Nora gets the news from Ann Lusk, who is the mountain girl, and she rides up to help her lover. Childress throws Gerald into the drink."

"Pardon me, Mr. Bassett," the star interrupted, coldly. "Mr. Childress does nothing of the kind! He throws my double in."

"Oh, of course," Bassett corrected himself, impatiently. "That's Rod McQueen. He throws McQueen in—and Gerald goes back to the make-up box and powders his nose. At any rate, Nora jumps in after the man. That's when the dam is blown up. Is that clear. They seemed to think it was. Nora Norris, the statuesque leading woman, in fashionably-cut knickerbockers and with her hair marceled, looked Rod McQueen over with distaste. Rod grinned at her. She sniffed, threw up her chin, and turned away from him."

"Who is that fellow?" she demanded of a neighbor.

"A new extra man, I believe. Pick-up of Duke's."

"Ugh!" the Norris said. "I hope he can swim."

THE camera man was already set up for a long shot. Half a dozen minor people were herded into place and coached as to their duties and responsibilities. Red worked his way around to Miss Norris' side and gazed at her with the frank awe of a nine-year-old boy. Norris made a face at him.

"All ready for the end of the fight scene, now?" Bassett called, suddenly stepping back out of range of the lens. "Come on in, McQueen, and close with Childress. That's it. There's a chalk-line there, to mark where Gerald stood at the start

of the scene yesterday. Both of you on that!"

"Now, try it once, but don't duck McQueen. Don't want him to have to change for the take . . . He hands you back, McQueen. Fight him, Childress! Good—and now Barnett! Ugh with the broken car-blade—and in—hit him! Out, McQueen! And that's where you'll go over the edge. Fine! Ready, Curly!"

"Shoot 'em in the foot!" the surly cameraman responded.

"This time we take it. Ready—action—go!"

The fight was realistic. When Barnett, playing as one of the enemy gang, struck Rod McQueen with the broken car Rod was really shaken and it was no task for Childress, the "heavy," to send him tottering over the bank and into deep water. Bassett, his mekaphone at his lips, was clapping his knee with one hand approvingly.

"Now, Nora! On! What is this? Shove Childress aside—look—there he is! Oh, he's stunned! What shall I do? . . . And in you go, Fine! Cut!"

The director waved to the cameraman and ran up to the rocks. "Better stay where you are," he called, to the two below. "Can you touch bottom, McQueen? Well, tread it, then. Hang on to him, Nora; he'll steady you till Curly gets a set-up. Then we'll shoot the rest of it fast."

In the water Rod McQueen was able at last to find bottom, and was now standing on tiptoe too deep above the surface with Nora Norris employing him as a float. The new actor turned his face toward hers.

"I'll bet you don't love this to death," he said.

"I don't see any necessity for conversation between us," Miss Norris retorted, leily.

"But I couldn't help saying that. It's too bad a good-looking girl like you have to be taken with her hair plastered down over her head like a sick squaw's. And your paint is slipping."

"I'll thank you to attend to your own business!" the star snapped.

"No offense, lady!" Rod said, remorselessly. "But couldn't I hold you closer to me so's you could borrow a powder-puff?"

"If you think working together is the same as an introduction you're crazy!" the angry woman exclaimed.

"There you go! I'm not directing this picture, Miss Norris, but it seems to me like you're out of character, as Bassett says. I thought that you was supposed to be in love with me."

"I wish I could drown you!" Miss Norris retorted, feelingly.

Duke Bassett's voice interrupted. "All set! Shoot the scene off, now. McQueen is stunned and helpless. Hold him up, Nora. Oh, that won't do! You're holding him like he was a fish! He's your lover—try to play it that way!"

"He's no such thing!" the Norris cried. "He's a fresh hand. Hurry up and shoot—I'm not going to stay out here with this egg forever!"

BASSETT put down his mekaphone and drew a long breath, placed his arms akimbo, and addressed the angry girl in a cutting drawl.

"My dear young woman," he said, "this is a picture of a rescue of a man by a girl who loves him enough to risk her life for him. At the present moment, even at this distance, you look like a steeptrooper who has found a dead cat in her bed! When you're ready to act I'm ready to shoot."

"Oh, all right!" the girl responded, swimming strongly out from the rocks. And she drew Rod McQueen closer to her and put on an expression supposed to register love-terified, anxious and selfless.

"Not too good!" Bassett criticised, from the rocks. "But we'll take it. Camera!"

Fileen began to crank his black box. Rod McQueen, who had been aiding the work of rescue to that point by kicking gently, suddenly let himself relax. He went down, pulling Miss Norris after him. She gave him a disgusted twitch. When they came up she was too mad to watch her stroke and they went under for a second time. Their progress toward the low dam below was rapid. When they came up they could hear Bassett shouting extravagant words of praise. Nora Norris, enraged and choking, tried to free her-

self from her cloying burden, but Rod held her like a mummy.

"Wonderful scene!" Bassett was megaphoning ecstatically. "Now, McQueen, you begin to revive. Bob up—high. That's it! You see Nora! Oh, darling! Great! Now begin to swim in. But the current is too much for you. Nora, you give out. Give out! Drat it, Nora—that's it, McQueen, grab her! Pull her under, if you have to! Well, let her drown. If she won't play! That's bully! Down fast, now! Heavens, there's the dam! Nothing can save you! Over you go! Cut! Oh, a peach of a scene!"

He ran down the rocks, along the edge of the reservoir and into the meadow below. Miss Norris, so angry she was almost in tears, was dragging herself up on the shore. She was disheveled, raging, half-drowned. Between sobs and gasps she unlimbered a fairly adequate store of strong and expressive words, which she appeared to be using to describe what she thought of Gerald Sisson's double. Rod McQueen, bland, child-like, and puzzled, withdrew modestly out of range of the leading woman's turned her batteries on Duke Bassett. Those who heard say that Duke took an awful lashing. But Miss Norris obstinately refused to give any one an idea of what it was all about.

It was a long hour before Bassett finally brought the indignant woman to the point where she would go on. But when she did she was glum, and stiff, still out of patience and full of spleen. Duke Bassett lost his patience in the end and let her act the part herself, in her own way.

JUST before noon they came to the point where little Ann Lusk again entered the story. She was the mountain girl who had long been secretly and hopelessly in love with the struggling young lumber king, played by Gerald Sisson. She had discovered the plot to destroy the dam which gave him power for his saw-

mills; she had ridden hard to take the news to him, had found him gone, but warned the villagers whose homes were supposed to be endangered and had raced back to the dam. Bassett, tired and irritated, outlined the scene.

"You come on from the trees, Miss Lusk!" he cried, sharply. "Sisson and Miss Norris are down center. It's the first time you have ever seen them together. But you mean your fate in their love scene. See? Try it, now. And put a lot of feeling in it."

The timid little girl in her rough mountain clothes, shabby and mud-splashed from her supposed rescue dash, came forward. Bassett yelled at her.

"No! Go back! You look like a sack of meal. That's the man you love over there. Show me something. Let's see love on your face. Oh, thunder!"

Ann Lusk went back; tried it once again. Bassett, exhausted with a long morning when everything seemed to have gone wrong, endeavored to be patient. But the girl could not suit him. Finally, in his own disgust, he started the camera.

"Ready—action—go! Come on in—slowly. That's better. But you love that man. Love him! Oh . . . There, splendid! Why didn't you do that before. What are you crying? Splendid! Keep on with those tears. Our face, Emily!"

Our face, Emily! . . . Now, you—Nora! Look up! You don't see Miss Lusk. Snop and kiss him. Raise your head, too, Gerald. Hold it. Hold it. Cut! . . . Well, for Pete's sake,

which would relieve the great pressure on the man who had been selected to head the government.

Yes, it was realized, even then, that the head of the nation had other and more important duties to fulfill than sitting down at a desk and signing his name all day long. There were weighty and complex problems to be thought out.

THE work that the little lady does is affixing the signature, Warren G. Harding, to great numbers of land patents. These are brought to her desk in bundles, and each must have the President's signature written on it before it is a legal document. No one in this world, except the President or Mrs. Pugh, can make it an official document.

Hour after hour Mrs. Pugh sits and writes "Warren G. Harding," and lest the reader may regret the impression that the signer of the President's name was selected for her ability skillfully to reproduce the name of the President it is but fair to say that Mrs. Pugh does not try in any way to imitate the chief executive's signature, that she was not chosen because of any qualifications such as were ascribed to that character of fiction, Jim the Penman, and that her writing is totally unlike that of the man whose name she signs. Hers is a feminine scrip, while the President writes what might be termed a "rough-and-ready" hand, more along the lines of a business man, but some of the characteristics of his writing show a touch of the literary bent. In fact, the signature of Warren G. Harding is what experts would call a complex style. It has strokes that are blunt, and the next instant there is marked evidence of a lighter shade of treatment.

THE work done by the woman consists of signing documents that give away, as far as the government is concerned, really gives away anything, many thousands of acres of land to those who are desirous of having a ranch, a farm, a home, or a section of land on which to raise part of the food-stuffs of the world.

Picture to yourself the task of writing the President's name over 250,000 times, for that is about the number of signatures that Mrs. Pugh has written during the time that she has been at her present work. The time covers a period of two years, this coming August.



"GO ON BEING HURT FOR A MINUTE, OR I'LL HAVE TO HURT YOU AGAIN."